

PLEASE RETURN UPON COMPLETION

*Planning and Implementation for  
Downtown Parking and Traffic Circulation  
Nantucket, Massachusetts*

December 1993

This project was made possible through funding from the Emerging Downtown Partnership (funded by the Executive Office of Communities and Development) and the Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission.

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## Introduction

This report is a summary of the ideas and strategies for downtown traffic and circulation issues that emerged as a result of intensive charettes held on island. Charette participants were a broad representation of island interests ranging from public officials and various public/private associations to merchants and residents.

The report is presented in three sections:

- a) **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats:** This section summarizes the perceptions and realities as expressed by the charette participants. The goal of this brainstorming exercise is to be able to articulate the good along with the bad and to build on your strengths while attempting to alleviate the weaknesses.
- b) **Recommended Action Steps:** The recommended actions are presented categorically. These steps are a direct outcome of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- c) **Implementation Strategy:** This section organizes the recommended actions into a short term and long term strategy. It also attempts to assign preliminary responsibility to players within the community.

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

It is apparent that downtown Nantucket has been experiencing increasing traffic congestion and parking problems over the years. In an effort to investigate options to alleviate some of the congestion, the Emerging Downtown Partnership and the Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission sponsored three charette sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to brainstorm and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as seen by Nantucket residents. This paper is a summary of issues raised at the three charettes.

## Strengths

1. A positive mix of cars and people signifying a real community.
2. The pleasant congenial and friendly attitude of people on the streets.
3. The patience of drivers on the road. People don't blow the horn or get mad with pedestrians or other motorists.
4. There is no pattern to accidents. There are no signal lights. People are cautious.
5. Lack of city mentality. People talk to each other, make eye contact and willing to help. Tourists are on vacation, laid-back and carefree. There is a sense of adventure.

6. The scale of downtown. It is compact, walk-able and one doesn't need a car to get around downtown.
7. The trees and the architecture. The quintessential embodiment of historic Nantucket.
8. A healthy, vital, viable downtown with little or no vacancy in season.
9. The island has a sense of history and identity. The quaint character, charming, artistic and unique.
10. Great amenities. Institutions, commerce, specialty shops, recreational and entertainment opportunities, food and lodging.
11. The setting: proximity to water.
12. Cobblestones add character to downtown and slow down traffic.
13. Crowds and traffic keep people moving slowly. Cars add a sense of activity and excitement
14. People take pride in downtown. Residents want to go downtown. Downtown is still perceived as essential.
15. Nantucket lives up to peoples expectations. Tourists are overwhelmed. "It's a Hollywood backdrop of New England".

## **Weaknesses**

1. Tourists are lost and confused when they get off the boat. There are no directional signs and the congestion is frustrating.
2. The conflict between cars and pedestrians adds to the traffic congestion. People are walking on the streets and paying little attention to traffic rules.
3. The tourists have tunnel vision, no concept as to where their bags are, where the inns are or where they should be going. Utter confusion.
4. Too many cars in summer. Summer folk bring three and four cars per family. The volume of traffic is stressful.
5. Summer residents have an attitude. They are less tolerant of the day tripper as their livelihood is not dependent on the tourist.

6. One is auto dependent if one needs to get out of downtown. It is difficult to get around without a car at this point in time.
7. There is no viable public transit alternative.
8. The people that work in town cannot find parking. "Wheel rollers".
9. The town parking lot is poorly laid out and therefore underutilized.
10. There is a perception that cars are taking over. Downtown is becoming less pedestrian friendly.
11. The tourist/resident misconception. Tourists are caught in the fantasy island syndrome. They fail to realize that real people live and work here.
12. The streets are poorly laid out, there are no signs and the sidewalks are too narrow forcing people to walk on the streets.
13. Big Elm trees, although extremely attractive, heave the pavements and access required by ADA difficult.
14. The Electric Company and Tank Farm are aesthetic eye sores
15. The state controls speed limits. The island should have greater say in the matter and be able to enforce slower speeds.
16. The steamship arrives at peak hours (noon time and 5pm), making the congestion problem worse.
17. The steamship wharf design adds to the confusion.
18. The off loading of delivery trucks.
19. Tourists buses keep getting larger while old bus routes become increasingly inadequate.
20. Main Street is becoming "boutiquey".
21. Weather dictates the mood and activity of tourists. If the weather is good, people are happy - if the weather is bad, people are mad.

22. The presence of "do nothing" apathy. People seem to forget the problems of summer by the end of the year.
23. Resistance to education and understanding change.
24. Infrastructure in downtown is outdated. Downtown is dealing with 20th century problems and 18th century infrastructure.
25. The lack of political will to make hard decisions regarding traffic and congestion issues.

### **Opportunities**

1. The problems are not deep rooted. Recovery is possible. People are willing to make small sacrifices, especially if they are not targeted toward one segment of society.
2. Control and restrict cars coming across on the steamship.
3. Redesign the steamship wharf to facilitate better circulation and accommodate parking.
4. Set time restrictions for delivery trucks such that they do not coincide with regular traffic or times of congestion.
5. Restrict size of freight vehicles that can be allowed on island.
6. Provide seasonal mass transit during peak summer months.
7. An in town bike path could prove to be a great opportunity and relieve much of the present parking problem.
8. Attractive street signs could alleviate much of the confusion. Signs would have to be sensitive to the historic nature of the downtown, yet designed such that they are not easily removed and taken away as momentos.
9. Investigate alternative sites for off loading of goods. This could relieve the stress and conflict of pedestrian and delivery vehicles.
10. A refrigeration facility would facilitate deliveries only during certain times of the day.
11. Encourage employees to car pool or use alternate means of transportation through incentives and good business practice.

12. Educate and inform tourists of the congestion and encourage them not to bring vehicles to the island.
13. Formulate a Parking Authority that could use money generated through parking tickets and towing to upgrade parking lots and make other necessary improvements related to circulation and traffic.
14. Initiate a dialogue with the steamship authority to control and limit freight ship schedules. Encourage freight delivery before 10am.
15. Investigate alternative sites for the Tank Farm and Electric Company, such that the present site can be put to better use.
16. Encourage volunteers to meet the ship and direct people to their destinations. Uniform courtesy police or students could do the job.
17. The long trip over on the ship provides a captive audience for an audio visual presentation and orientation to the island. This informative and directional presentation would eliminate some of the confusion (and frustration) on docking.
18. Provide a reliable shuttle system or alternative mode of in-season, downtown core, public transportation. This should include transportation to and from peripheral parking lots such as the High School lot, so that employees, residents and tourists do not have to drive downtown.
19. Encourage essential and convenience stores to locate outside town so that people do not have to drive downtown for goods.
20. Relocate the Police, Fire and Motor Vehicle Registry Departments to a better site that provides easy egress and adequate parking.
21. Consider providing town vehicles for town business or vouchers for taxis such that employees are not required to drive their cars to work.
22. Consider changing maximum parking time from one hour to half an hour making it increasingly cumbersome for "wheel rollers".
23. Investigate the Bermuda system where only land owners can have cars on the island. Tourists are not allowed to bring cars onto the island.

24. Purchase land for parking.
25. Identify existing private parking for public use (e.g., Dreamland Theater parking lot).
26. Experiment with pilot programs such as:
  - a) Close certain sections of downtown to vehicular traffic at certain times.
  - b) Limit access to downtown for tourist busses and large trucks and trailers.
  - c) Limit one parking sticker per family for downtown parking.

## **Threats**

1. Residents love Main Street and fear that increased congestion will force them to stay away from downtown.
2. Congestion will become the price of doing business and recovery will become more difficult.
3. Providing more parking is not the solution. More parking will only encourage more cars and the problem will worsen.
4. The market place will lose its feel. There is already evidence of Main Street becoming too tourist oriented.
5. As stores cater to the affluent and rents get higher, necessity shops can't make it. This is seen as a threat to lifers. Islanders have to go off island to buy goods at affordable prices.
6. Tourists come to the island to get away from the city and its symptoms. The increased congestion and chaos will affect the tourist trade. The island's livelihood is dependent on tourism.
7. Nantucket must maintain its sense of place and uniqueness. This could be threatened. The Island could become an affluent enclave and lose being a real place for real working people.
8. Traffic and congestion continues to increase. This summer peaked in terms of cars on the island. Infrastructure cannot keep up with the strain. Safety is an issue.
9. The lack of diversity in the employment base makes the Island especially susceptible to the changes in the tourism industry. Over the years, the island has concentrated so much on the tourist that it is no longer a self-sufficient community.

10. Young people cannot afford to live on the Island. Real people will move away as things get increasingly less affordable.
11. Large landowners downtown do not take an active role in the planning and issues relating to the area. There is a lack of leadership.
12. If the civic functions move out of downtown to relieve summer congestion, downtown would be a ghost town in winter. There will be no reason for residents to come downtown.
13. As congestion is primarily a seasonal phenomenon, people tend to forget how serious a problem this really is. Enthusiasm and the will to do something fades as the year goes on.
14. City solutions to city problems are not acceptable on the Island (e.g., signal lights and parking meters).
15. The lack of political will and fear of change will make this exercise another plan to be shelved without any action.

## **Recommendations and Actions Steps**

There are no easy solutions to the parking and circulation problems of Downtown Nantucket. Further there is no tenable dramatic solution (i.e. ban all vehicles) that is politically acceptable. There are, however, a series of recommended actions which, together, can improve how people and vehicles move in and through the Downtown. These are explained below.

### **A. On the Pedestrian Tourist**

The pedestrian tourist, upon entering Nantucket, is frequently confused. There are few directional signs and few public officials to assist them. They are also happy, on vacation and in a carefree mood. They often forget about the "rules of the road" and freely intermingle with vehicular traffic. For these reasons we recommend the following:

- 1) That brochures and audio visual programs be actively used on all ferries entering the Island. These brochures and videos would indicate and explain how one can walk to all key points. Safety and courtesy tips should be included. Note: These brochures and videos could be promotional as well, advertising various Island retail attractions.
- 2) That a seasonal courtesy patrol be established for the Downtown Area. The patrol officers would be assigned to assist off loading tourists and to facilitate pedestrian flow through the Downtown. They could also provide a nudge to the drivers of the ubiquitous delivery trucks to "move along". These courtesy patrols were quite effective in Downtown Portland, Oregon and Downtown Amherst, Massachusetts.
- 3) That a system of coded route signs be established that guide pedestrian walkers from the ferries to key points in the Downtown. One system that comes to mind is the routing scheme of Boston's MBTA. Another is the dot system found at Mount Monadnock. The system would involve painting trail markers on sidewalks and/or placing dot markers on street poles.
- 4) That new signage be placed in the Downtown. It is estimated that more than 160 of Nantucket's beautiful signs adorn college rooms across the United States! To make it more difficult to remove the signs, it is recommended that they be placed on buildings and/or that a Nantucket adaptation of the European sign obelisk system be created. If neither of these options prove feasible then we recommend that standard signage, approved by historic preservationists, be adopted.

- 5) That travel agencies and travel writers be requested to inform their clients and readers that vehicular travel is expensive and time consuming. At the same time, the information should stress that the Island is pedestrian friendly.

## **B. On Parking**

Parking in downtown is at a premium. By all accounts, conditions are becoming worse due to, among other factors, more vehicles on the Island, the free movement of delivery trucks in the Downtown (blocking parking access and egress points) and the wheel rolling phenomena. Our recommended actions are the following:

- 1) That no new short term parking lots be created. These lots will simply add to the congestion that already exists.
- 2) That the Washington Street lot be re-examined to determine if a more efficient parking scheme can be created. A similar opportunity exists at the parking lot near the Steamship Terminal entrance.
- 3) That permission (a contract?) be obtained from the Dreamland Theater owners such that the existing lot can be used during periods when the theater is not in use.
- 4) That the Town lot be re-graded and paved. Furthermore, signs directing vehicle users to the lot need to be in place.
- 5) That when and if a shuttle system is established, that the High School lot and the Airport be explored as potential satellite parking areas.

## **C. On Parking Management**

The problems related to Downtown parking are as much related to people who work downtown as they are to the tourists. By all accounts, the majority of workers in Downtown drive to work. These people should be encouraged to either park elsewhere or to use alternate systems. We recommend the following:

- 1) That the Town Selectmen strongly discourage employees from constantly moving their cars to beat the parking time restrictions. This practice seems to be disruptive to both work patterns (output) and ensuring adequate parking for Downtown users.

- 2) That the Downtown merchants strongly discourage their workers from parking downtown. This problem is not so much a case of workers parking in front of the stores in which they work. Rather, it is a case of parking in front of another merchants store.
- 3) That the Selectmen adopt a set time period in which deliveries can be made in the Downtown Area. This approach has been quite successful in Burlington, Vermont. It will require coordination with the Steamship Authority.
- 4) That non-voting residents of the Island be restricted to one vehicle per household that is authorized to park Downtown during the tourist season.
- 5) That a surcharge be placed on tourists bringing their vehicles to the Island if they wish to park in the Downtown area.
- 6) That all large busses be either, a) prohibited from access to Downtown Streets, or b) that a per seat surcharge be placed on each bus.
- 7) That the idea of a "Parking Authority" be fully explored. This Authority, for example, could take on the following:
  - a) Operate the Airport, High School and Town Lots.
  - b) Develop the sticker program governing bus, tourist and non voter vehicular use.
  - c) In conjunction with merchants and Selectmen, develop a shuttle voucher system.
  - d) Search for a private vendor that would be willing to provide shuttle services for the summer season. One idea would be to contract with ski resorts where such shuttles are common, provide a guaranteed break-even point and allow the vendor to take all further risks.
  - e) Enforce all parking/access regulations.
  - f) Collate revenues to sustain its operations through fines and permit fees.

#### **D. On the Bicyclist**

The Bicyclist should be strongly encouraged and provided with as much safety as possible. The Island has an extensive trail system in place and further expansion is expected. However, there is a disconnection between the trails and Downtown. For this reason, we recommend the following:

- 1) That bicycle trail and safety information be included in the proposed brochures to be placed in the ferries.
- 2) That bicycle trails that connect exiting routes to the Island points of entry be planned .
- 3) If it proves impossible to construct trails through the Downtown, that road markings be established that show the safest manner in which to get to the trails.
- 4) That adequate bicycle racks be installed the Downtown Area.

### **E. On the Relocation of Civic Functions**

We are quite concerned over the removal of these functions from the downtown. It is our professional opinion that they belong in the Core. Nonetheless, if it is the will of Island residents to remove these functions then we recommend the following:

- 1) That the administrative center remain in Downtown regardless of the removal of other civic functions.
- 2) If the police, fire and registry facilities are relocated then they should be used as a "capital web" that will attract small adjacent retail activities designed for necessity goods.
- 3) The police, fire and registry facilities should be located in areas where large peripheral parking lots could also be constructed.

## Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy is in two parts. The first is a series of activities that can be implemented within the next year. These tend to be administrative and/or are low cost in nature. The second represent those actions that require more time and require significant public investment.

### **Actions that could be undertaken within the next year:**

- 1) The Selectmen should appoint a committee to initiate a dialogue with the Steamship Authority and/or request their state legislators to call a conference on Steamship Issues. The goal would be for Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and the Mainland to come to mutual agreement on crucial issues. The key issues include:
  - a) The location of the freight ferry.
  - b) The timing of freight deliveries.
  - c) The size of vehicles allowed on the ferries.
- 2) The Town Department of Public Works should replace and/or add informational and directional signs immediately. These should meet Island design and historic standards and be difficult to remove. This could be achieved through normal appropriations to the DPW budget.
- 3) The island should actively pursue ISTE funding for projects that require large sums of money. The first step toward that is to urge the Planning Commission to revise the TIP list to reflect the downtown traffic priorities.
- 4) The Selectmen should appoint a committee to explore the potential of expanding the role of the Regional Transit Authority or creating a new Island-wide Parking Authority. This Authority could be responsible, for example, for the following:
  - a) Operate the Airport, High School and Town Lots.
  - b) Develop the sticker program governing bus, tourist and non voter vehicular use.
  - c) In conjunction with merchants and Selectmen, develop a shuttle voucher system.
  - d) Search for a private vendor that would be willing to provide shuttle services for the summer season. One idea would be to contract with ski resorts where such shuttles are common, provide a guaranteed break-even point and allow the vendor to take all further risks.
  - e) Enforce all parking/access regulations.
  - f) Collect revenues to sustain its operations through fines and permit fees.

- 5) The carrying of hazardous materials through downtown is a health and safety issue. The Selectmen should create a committee to determine alternate routes for vehicles carrying hazardous materials that move the waste out of downtown. This committee should report back within three months and a new compulsory, alternate route should be so designated. The banning of material in the downtown area can be stipulated in the town bylaws and regulations..
- 6) Visitors Services should develop informative and directional brochures and audio visual aids to be used during the ferry boat trip over to the island. Brochures should also be distributed to travel agencies specializing in island travel.
- 7) The Selectmen should develop a program that requires town employees to park their vehicles outside of downtown during the summer months. The high school parking lot would appear to be an appropriate site. A taxi voucher system, funded by the town and the employees, could be developed that transports workers from lots to downtown.
- 8) The Selectmen should develop a program that limits deliveries in the downtown area between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm during peak tourist season. Once again, this can be accomplished through an amendment to the bylaws.
- 9) There is a need for more courtesy greeters at the ferry docks and in the downtown area during the summer months. They should be moving, easily recognized and fully informed about tourist needs. Possible funding sources such as the Merchants Association, the Visitors Services and other associations should be pursued. The use of partial revenue from room occupancy taxes could be explored to fund this activity.
- 10) The Selectmen should sponsor an article at town meeting that restricts the number of vehicles per household that can park downtown during the summer months. A mobile sticker program could be one solution.
- 11) The Selectmen should adopt a policy that limits the size of vehicles in the downtown area. This can be achieved through an amendment to the bylaws and would not require a home rule petition.
- 12) The Selectmen should appoint a committee to explore the potential of developing a contractual relationship with a private firm on the Cape that would enable tourists to the

Island and residents that commute off island frequently to inexpensively park their vehicles off Island.

- 13) The Town Department of Public Works should create a coded system of signs and markers to guide bicyclists to the bicycle paths. This too could be achieved through normal appropriations to the DPW budget.
- 14) The Merchants should require their employees to park in satellite lots. The Taxi Association could create a voucher system that enables downtown private and public employees to easily and inexpensively to move from the satellite lots to downtown.

### **Actions that will require a longer time period:**

- 1) That a transit system be developed that is timely, reliable and focuses on the downtown core. It is also recommended that a contractual relationship between the Island's future transit authority and another winter oriented resort transit organization be explored.
- 2) That satellite parking areas be created. At a minimum, these would include the Town lot, the Airport lot and the High School lot. In the absence of a Parking Authority, this would fall under the jurisdiction of the selectmen. This sort of activity could be a prime candidate for ISTEA funding.
- 3) In order to facilitate the limited delivery times in the downtown core, a freight truck staging area should be created in one of the satellite parking areas. This could be another candidate for ISTEA funds.
- 4) That a Long Range Plan be developed to explore the feasibility of the "Bermuda System" (a system which limits vehicles to permanent residents) being adapted to Nantucket.
- 5) That a tourist campaign be developed that provides information in the ferry boats concerning how tourists can get around the Island and adapt to Island conditions. The Visitors Services should take the lead on this campaign.
- 6) In the event of relocating the police, fire and registry facilities, it is important to provide adequate parking or strong links with the satellite parking areas.

## **Select Financial Resources**

### **I. Economic Development Administration**

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) has a wide variety of programs aimed at encouraging economic development including public works programs, business loans, and economic planning grants. Four of the major programs and their current regulations are described below:

#### **A. Title I Public Works and Development Facilities:**

States, municipalities, special authorities, and public or private non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for grants for the acquisition, development, or expansion of public works facilities. Included are: water and sewer systems, site improvements for industrial parks, factories and port facilities. These funds cannot be used for the acquisition of land. Grants are for 50% to 80% of project cost depending on location. In order to apply for grants, an area must have an approved Overall Economic Development Program (OEDP) on file with EDA.

#### **B. Title II Business Development Loans:**

Any public or private entity including non-profit corporations, sole proprietorships and partnerships are eligible to apply for direct loans to be used for the acquisition of fixed assets (land, building, equipment, machinery); land preparation; building rehabilitation; and working capital for industrial or commercial enterprises. Loans are available for up to 65% of project cost with up to 25 years to repay for fixed asset loans, and 5 years for working capital loans. Interest rates are based on the current U.S. Treasury borrowing rates. EDA also guarantees up to 90% of the unpaid balance of loans and up to 90% of rental payments on guaranteed leases. Interest rates on guaranteed loans are at prevailing market rates.

All loans must be consistent with the areas Overall Economic Development Program and be approved by a state or local economic development agency.

#### **C. Title III Economic Development Planning Grants:**

Government entities and organizations engaged in planning economic development activities can apply for direct grants to fund planning, staffing and administrative expenses related to economic development planning projects. A 25% non-federal match is required. Grants are for one year and are ordinarily renewed.

#### **D. Supplemental and Basic Grants Program (Section 304):**

The 304 program provides states (which must provide a 25% match) with monies to initiate and enhance eligible economic development projects. The types of eligible projects includes: grants for public works and development facilities; loans for public works and development facilities; business and industrial loans and loan guarantees; grants for technical assistance, research, and economic development planning; and grants for special economic development and adjustment assistance. Projects must conform to the state's economic development goals and policies.

#### **Eligibility:**

In general, the following are eligible to apply: The authorities and quasi-public corporations created by the state or by municipalities; non-profit organizations representing any redevelopment area or part thereof; and private profit-making entities.

### **II. Community Development Action Grant (CDAG)**

Under the Community Development Action Grant (CDAG) Program, grants are made to cities and towns for public actions in support of private investments. This competitive program is designed to stimulate economic development activities that will attract and leverage private investment, create or retain long-term employment and/or housing opportunities, and revitalize distressed areas throughout the state. In so doing, the program supports only those private investments that would not occur, but for the receipt of CDAG funds.

### **III. Revolving Loan Funds**

Any bank that regularly provides credit is operating a revolving loan fund. All "revolving" means is that when loans are repaid, the money returns to a pool of available funds to be lent out to someone else. The basic reason for a revolving loan fund is to reduce the bank's risk enough to persuade bank loan administrators to participate in the financing they may not make ordinarily.

Loan funds set up by organizations for this purpose come in two forms: direct and guarantee. With a direct loan fund, the organization extends a portion of the total loan needed by the business. Normally the group takes a subordinated position to the bank, which means that in case of default the bank has priority in recovering its losses from sale of the firm's assets.

Loan guarantee programs work somewhat differently. Instead of actually making part of the loan, the guarantor agrees to insure the bank against some percentage of losses. Organizations that operate guarantee funds usually deposit the amount they are insuring at the bank during the

term of the loan. This "compensating balance" insures to the bank that the moneys are indeed available to guarantee its loan. It also provides a bonus for the bank: additional funds it can loan to other customers during the life of the revolving loan guarantee.

#### **IV. Farmers Home Administration**

The Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) administers several programs directed toward economic development in "rural" areas. Many older centers qualify as "rural".

**Community Facility Loans:** Public agencies, as well as non-profit corporations, are eligible to apply for loans to construct or improve community facilities which provide essential services to rural residents. Towns and special purpose districts of 10,000 population or less are eligible. Facilities which provide residents with safety and protection (such as fire stations and hospitals) are given first priority. Large loans are discouraged. The interest rate on these loans fluctuates every quarter and is based on the prime rate.

#### **V. The Tax Reform Act of 1986**

The Tax Reform Act of 1986 established a 20% tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation of historic buildings for commercial, industrial and rental residential purposes, and a 10% tax credit for the substantial rehabilitation for non residential purposes of buildings built before 1936. A straight-line depreciation period of 27.5 years for residential property and 31.5 years for non residential property for the depreciable basis of the rehabilitated building reduced by the amount of the tax credit claimed.

The 10% tax credit is not available for rehabilitation of certified historic structures, and owners who have properties within registered historic districts.

#### **VI. Local Historic District**

The Purpose of an historic district is to give historical or architectural significance, and to encourage new designs that are compatible with the existing buildings. A local historic-district commission reviews proposed exterior changes to buildings or applications for new construction and rules on the appropriateness of the proposal. There are seldom provisions in local historic districts for financial support for rehabilitation, nor is there necessarily any protection from adverse effects of federal programs, but if the local district is certified by the Secretary of the Interior as meeting National Register criteria, the local district may be eligible for tax benefits. The HDC should look into the possibilities that may exist.

## VII. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA)

In late 1991, Congress enacted the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), providing authorizations for highways, highway safety, and mass transportation for the next six (6) years. Total funding of about \$155 billion will be available for fiscal years (FY) 1992 to 1997. The purpose of the Act is clearly enunciated in its statement of policy:

*"to develop a National Intermodal Transportation System that is economically efficient, environmentally sound, provides the foundation for the Nation to compete in the global economy and will move people and goods in an energy efficient manner."*

The provisions of the Act reflect these important policy goals. Some of the major features include:

- \* A National Highway System (NHS), consisting primarily of existing Interstate routes and a portion of the Primary System, is established to focus Federal resources on roads that are the most important to interstate travel and national defense. Roads that connect with other modes of transportation, and are essential for international commerce, are also a priority.
- \* State and local governments are given more flexibility in determining transportation solutions, whether transit or highways, and the tools of enhanced planning and management systems to guide them in making the best choices.
- \* New technologies, such as intelligent vehicle-highway systems and prototype magnetic levitation systems, are funded to push the nation forward into thinking of new approaches in providing 21st century transportation.
- \* The private sector is tapped as a source for funding transportation improvements. Restrictions on the use of federal funds for toll roads have been relaxed, and private entities may even own such facilities.
- \* The Act continues discretionary and formula funds for mass transit.
- \* Highway funds are available for activities that enhance the environment, such as wetland banking, mitigation of damage to wildlife habitat, historic sites, activities that contribute to meeting air quality standards, a wide range of bicycle and pedestrian projects, and highway beautification.
- \* Highway safety is further enhanced by a new program to encourage the use of safety belts and motorcycle helmets.
- \* State uniformity in vehicle registration and fuel tax reporting is required. This will ease the record keeping and reporting burden on businesses, and contribute substantially to increased productivity of the truck and bus industry.